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ASH-WEDNESDAY

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BY

T. S. ELIOT

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by

T. S. Eliot

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Made in the United States of America

TO
MY WIFE

ASH-WEDNESDAY

I

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for
there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place

And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct
something
Upon which to rejoice

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much
discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our
death

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

II

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-
tree

In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which
had been contained

In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live? And that which had been con-
tained

In the bones (which were already dry) said
chirping:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here
dissembled

Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of
the gourd.

It is this which recovers

My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible
portions

Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white
gown.

Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetful-
ness.

There is no life in them. As I am forgotten
And would be forgotten, so I would forget
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose. And God
said

Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen. And the bones sang
chirping

With the burden of the grasshopper, saying

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving

Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends.

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered
and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to
each other,

Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the
 blessing of sand,
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which
 ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor
 unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our
 inheritance.

III

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jagged like an old man's mouth drivelling,
 beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture
 scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.

Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth
blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of
the mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and
despair
Climbing the third stair.

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

IV

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green
Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
Talking of trivial things
In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour
Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made
 fresh the springs

Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,
Sovegna vos

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring
One who moves in the time between sleep and
 waking, wearing

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.

The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years,
restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded
hearse.

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and
signed but spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang
down

Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from
the yew

And after this our exile

V

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still
whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Where shall the word be found, where will the
word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
For those who walk in darkness
Both in the day time and in the night time

The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among
noise and deny the voice

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and
oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season
and season, time and time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and
power, those who wait
In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew-trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender

And affirm before the world and deny between
the rocks

In the last desert between the last blue rocks

The desert in the garden the garden in the
desert

Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the
withered apple-seed.

O my people.

VI

Although I do not hope to turn again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to turn

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and
dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish
these things
From the wide window towards the granite
shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover

The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy
earth

This is the time of tension between dying and
birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree
drift away
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the
fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks

Sister, mother

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

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